

8 Science-Backed Reasons to Read a (Real) Book

Bookworms can see some serious perks to their health and happiness. Want to *really* reap the benefits of reading? Reach for an old-fashioned, printed book.

By Abigail Wise



Photo by Thomas Northcut/Getty Images

Although [more and more](#) people own e-books, it seems safe to say that *real* books aren't going anywhere yet. [Eighty-eight percent](#) of the Americans who read e-books continue to read printed ones as well. And while we're all for the convenience of digital downloads and a lighter load, we can't bring ourselves to part with the joy of a good, old-fashioned read.

There's nothing like the smell of old books or the crack of a new one's spine. (Plus, you'll never run low

on battery.) And it turns out that diving into a page-turner can also offer benefits toward your health and happiness. Here are eight smart reasons to read a *real* book.

It increases intelligence.

As Dr. Seuss once wrote, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." Diving into a good book opens up a whole world of knowledge starting from a very young age. Children's books expose kids to 50 percent more words than prime time TV, or even a conversation between college graduates, according to a [paper](#) from the University of California, Berkeley. Exposure to that new vocabulary not only leads to higher score on reading tests, but also [higher scores](#) on general tests of intelligence. Plus, stronger early reading skills [may mean](#) higher intelligence later in life.

A quick tip: If you're looking for a power read, opt for a traditional book. [Research](#) suggests that reading on a screen can slow you down by as much as 20 to 30 percent.

Plus, it can boost your brain power.

Not only does regular reading help make you smarter, but it can actually increase your brain power. Just like going for a jog exercises your cardiovascular system, reading regularly improves memory function by giving your brain a good [work out](#). With age comes a decline in memory and brain function, but regular reading may help slow the process, keeping minds sharper longer, according to research published in [Neurology](#). Frequent brain exercise was able to lower mental decline by 32 percent, reports [The Huffington Post](#).

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Reading can make you more empathetic.

Getting lost in a good read can make it easier for you to relate to others. Literary fiction, specifically, has the power to help its readers understand what others are thinking by reading other people's emotions, according to research published in [Science](#). The impact is much more significant on those who read literary fiction as opposed to those who read nonfiction. "Understanding others' mental states is a crucial skill that enables the complex social relationships that characterize human societies," David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano wrote of their findings.

Flipping pages can help you understand what you're reading.

When it comes to actually remembering what you're reading, you're [better off](#) going with a book than you are an e-book. The feel of paper pages under your fingertips provides your brain with some context, which can [lead to](#) a deeper understanding and better comprehension of the subject you're reading about, [Wired reports](#). So to reap the benefits of a good read, opt for the kind with physical pages.

It may help fight Alzheimer's disease.

Reading puts your brain to work, and that's a very good thing. Those who who engage their brains through activities such as reading, chess, or puzzles could be [2.5 times](#) less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than those who spend their down time on less stimulating activities. The paper suggests that exercising the brain may help because inactivity increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's, inactivity is actually an early indicator of the disease, or a little of each.

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Reading can help you relax.

There's a reason snuggling up with a good book (and maybe a glass of wine) after a long day sounds so appealing. Research suggests that reading can work as a serious stress-buster. One 2009 study by Sussex University researchers showed that reading may reduce stress by as much as [68 percent](#). "It really doesn't matter what book you read, by losing yourself in a thoroughly engrossing book you can escape from the worries and stresses of the everyday world and spend a while exploring the domain of the author's imagination," cognitive neuropsychologist David Lewis told [The Telegraph](#).

Reading before bed can help you sleep.

Creating a bedtime ritual, like reading before bed, signals to your body that it's time to wind down and go to sleep, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Reading a real book helps you relax more than zoning out in front of a screen before bed. Screens like e-readers and tablets can actually [keep you awake longer](#) and even *hurt* your sleep. That applies to kids too: Fifty-four percent of children sleep near a small screen, and clock 20 fewer minutes of shut-eye on average because of it, according to [research](#) published in *Pediatrics*. So reach for the literal page-turners before switching off the light.

Reading is contagious.

[Seventy-five percent](#) of parents wish their children would read more for fun, and those who want to encourage their children to become bookworms can start by reading out loud at home. While most parents stop reading out loud after their children learn to do it on their own, a [new report](#) from Scholastic suggests that reading out loud to kids throughout their elementary school years may inspire them to become frequent readers—meaning kids who read five to seven days per week for fun. More than 40 percent of frequent readers ages six through 10 were read to out loud at home, but only 13 percent of those who did not read often for fun were. Translation? Story time offers a good way to spark an interest in the hobby.